Promoting Authentic Language Use with Tasks

A primary goal of many English learners is to be able to communicate internationally as global citizens. However, among the language skills, speaking is difficult to master.

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) offers a principled approach to making language lessons more communicative and meaning-focused; tasks can offer learners compelling reasons to communicate.

In this webinar, we will:

- explore the four criteria of tasks and identify different task types

- share specific examples of successful classroom tasks

- consider how to develop tasks for our own classroom contexts

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Linh is the director of the English Language Program at Chatham University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and founder and director of Eduling International, which offers English language instruction and services to students from any location.

She has published about task-based language teaching, international student experiences, and learner engagement. Linh recently published a children's book called *Tug of Words* and released a free Eduling Speak app to connect learners to talk in pairs using communicative tasks.

Professionally, she serves as the Chair of the TESOL International Association Affiliate Network Professional Council (2022-23).
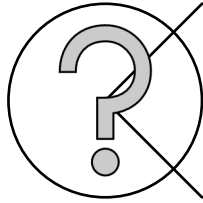
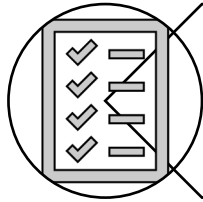U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

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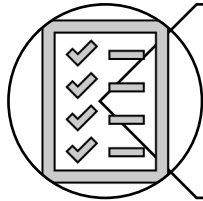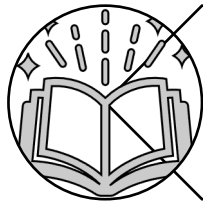# Promoting Authentic Language Use with Tasks

Agenda

The importance of authentic language use
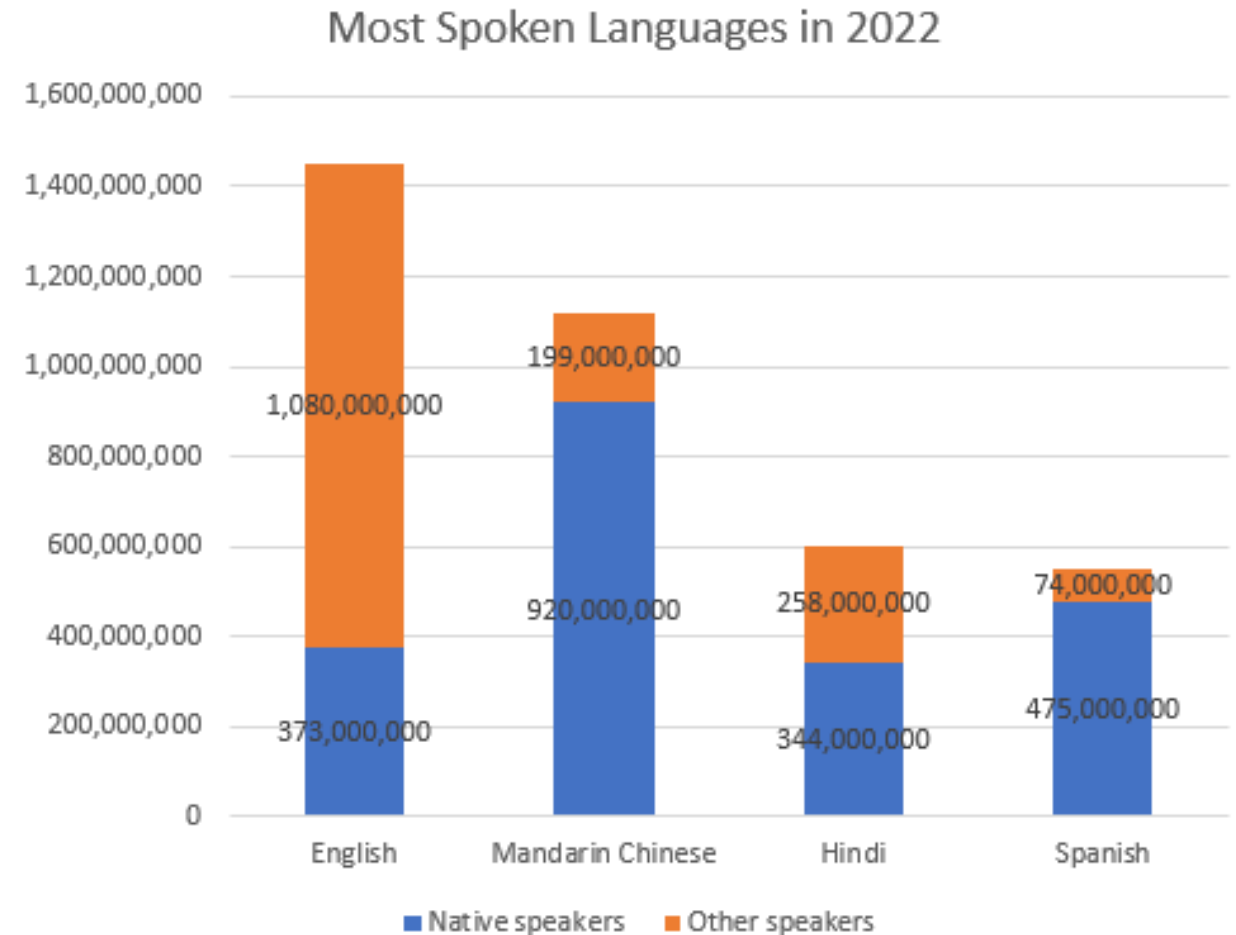
Criteria of a task

Task types

Task implementation considerations

The importance of authentic language use

- 1.5 billion English speakers
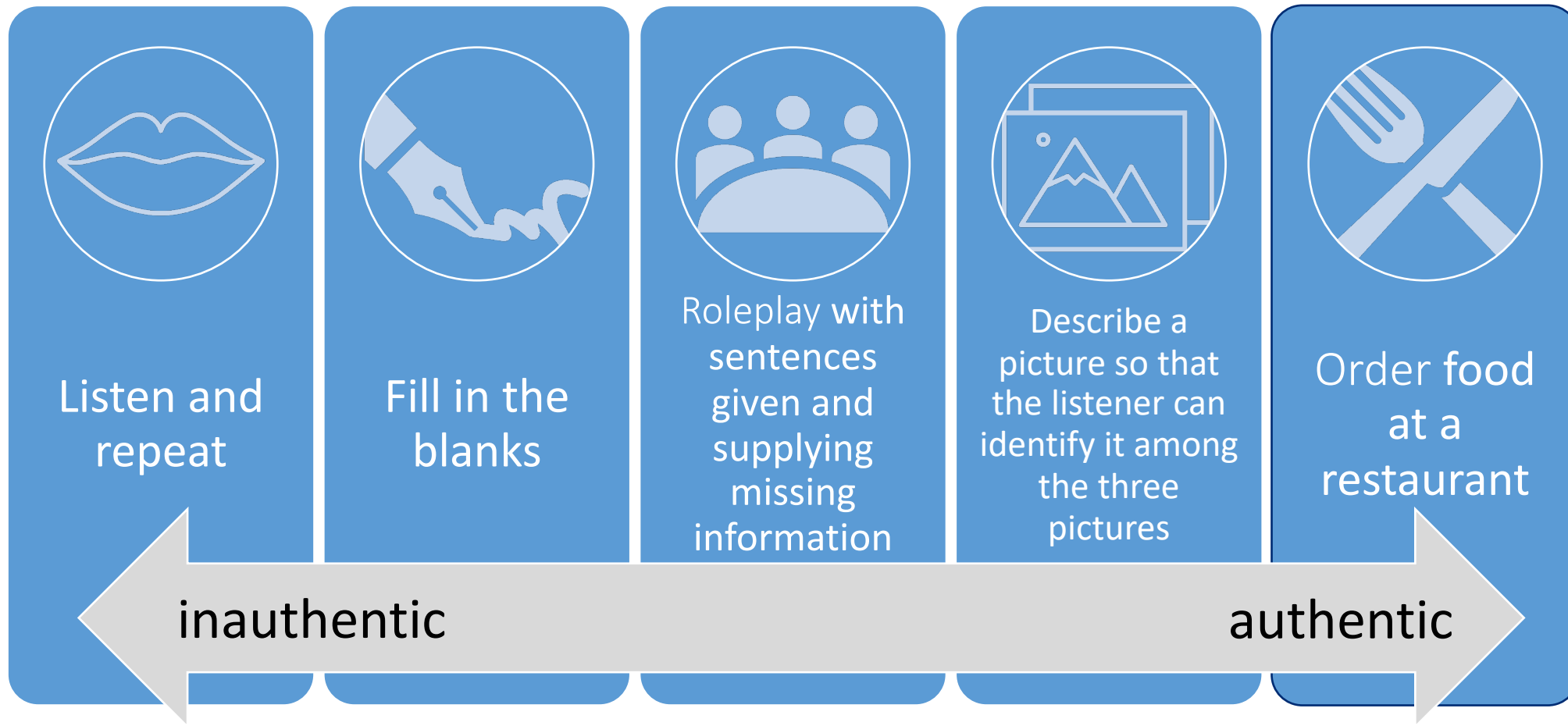- Goal of many learners: communicate internationally

However ...

- Speaking is difficult to master
  - Lack of opportunities to practice
  - Unwillingness to communicate
  - Controlled practice with minimal responses

Most Spoken Languages in 2022

Data from Eberhard, D., Simons G., & Fennig, C. (eds). (2022).

Authentic language use: English as a tool

Listen and repeat

Fill in the blanks

Roleplay with sentences given and supplying missing information

Describe a picture so that the listener can identify it among the three pictures

Order food at a restaurant

inauthentic

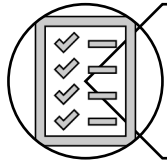authentic

Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT)

TBLT is an approach to language teaching that "aims to develop learners' communicative competence by engaging them in meaning-focused communication through the performance of tasks" (Ellis & Shintani, 2014, p. 135; Ellis, 2022)
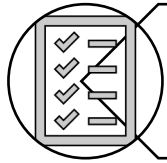
What is a task?

❓	The importance of authentic language use
☑	Criteria of a task ⭐
☑	Task types
📖	Task implementation

A task is an activity in which a person engages to **attain an objective**, and which requires the **comprehension and/or production of meaningful messages** (Van den Branden, 2006)

Examples of real-life communicative tasks: ordering food in a restaurant, scheduling a meeting with a colleague, finding a solution to a work problem
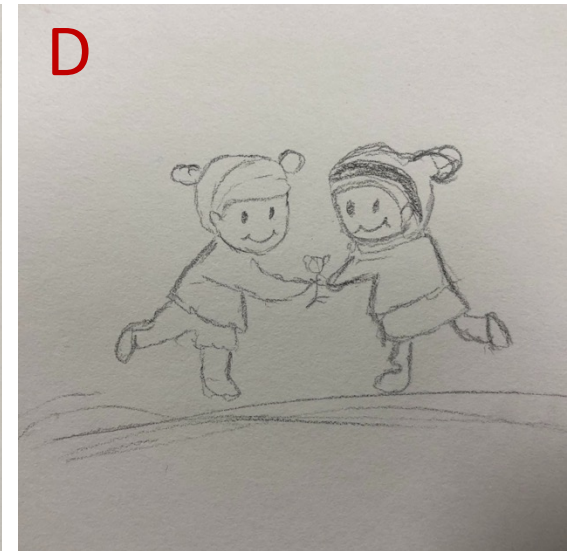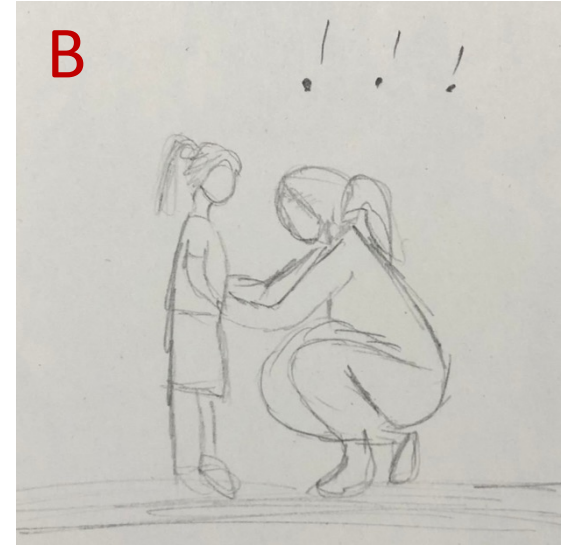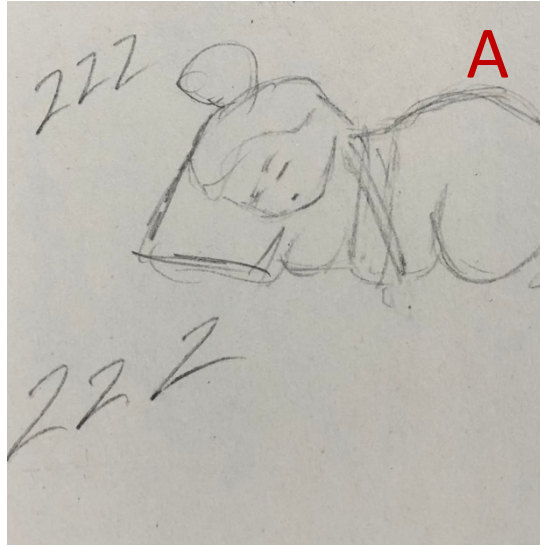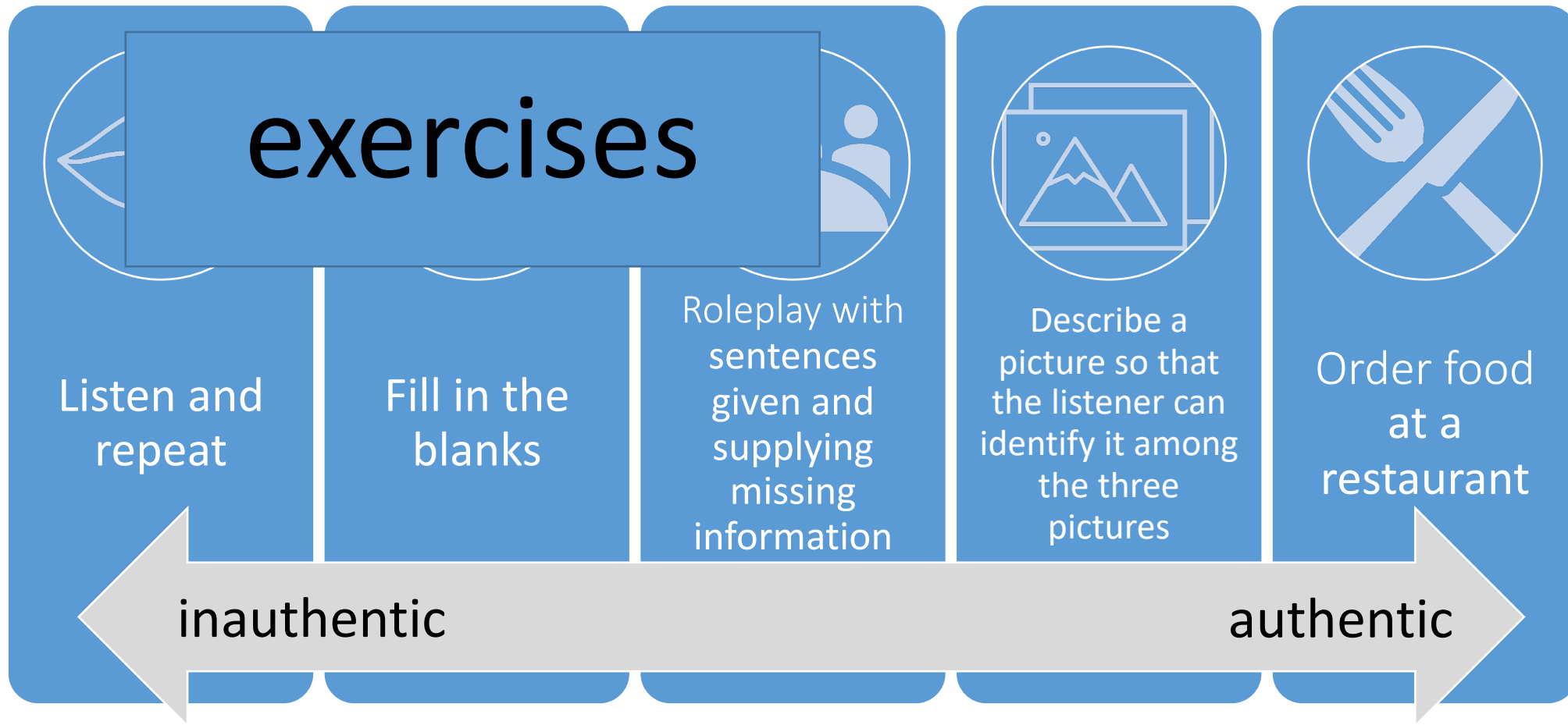
Question for you

What are other examples of real-life communicative tasks?

Criteria of a task (Ellis, 2003)

1. Learners' primary focus is on meaning
2. Learners use their own resources
3. There's a communicative gap
4. There's a non-linguistic outcome

What's not a task?

exercises

Listen and repeat

Fill in the blanks

Roleplay with sentences given and supplying missing information

Describe a picture so that the listener can identify it among the three pictures

Order food at a restaurant

inauthentic

authentic

A task or not a task?

- Having students debate who the best footballer is in groups

- Having students answer "Would You Rather" questions in pairs: Would you rather have five brothers or five sisters? Would you rather live in the sky or in the ocean?

- Having students tell a story about being scared to a partner

Is this a task?

Mia is ordering food from a server in a cafeteria. One of you is Mia. One of you is the server.

What Mia wants	What the server has
A hamburger	Ham sandwiches
French fries	French fries
A large coffee	Medium coffee
Brownie	Brownie

Based on the information you have, make a conversation like this.

Mia: Could I have _____ please?

The server: Here you are/ I'm sorry, I don't have it, but I have a _____.

This is considered a task

Student A

You are ordering food from a server. This is what you'd like to have. Make a conversation with the server to order your food. Put a tick next to the items that the server doesn't have.

What to order
❑ A hamburger
❑ French fries
❑ A large coffee
❑ Brownie

Student B

You are a server taking an order from a customer. This is what you have available. Make a conversation with the customer. Take notes of the items the customer ordered but you don't have.

What's available
❑ Ham sandwiches
❑ French fries
❑ Medium coffee
❑ Brownie

How does this activity meet the four criteria of a task?

1. Primary focus on meaning
2. Communicative gap
3. Own resources
4. Non-linguistic outcome

Spot the Difference: One-Way

Picture from the Tug of Words book
eduling.org/hl

Instructions

I (the presenter) have a picture that you don't see.

You have this picture.

There are some differences between the two pictures.

Listen to me describing my picture and identify three differences.

Spot the Difference: Two-Way

Student A

You have a picture, and your partner has a picture. There are five differences between them. Talk with your partner to mark five differences.
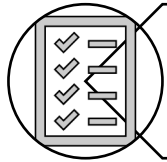

Student B

You have a picture, and your partner has a picture. There are five differences between them. Talk with your partner to mark five differences.
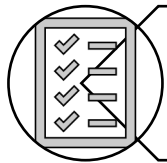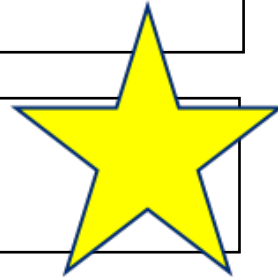
Task types

	The importance of authentic language use
	Criteria of a task
	Task types
	Task implementation

- Types of communicative gap

- Discourse types

Communicative Gap

- Information gap

- Opinion gap

- Decision making

- Language focus:
Text reconstruction/ Dictogloss

Jigsaw Reading and Jigsaw Viewing

- Choose a text with sections to divide among students or a video. (I usually choose short videos)

- Ask some students to read/watch half of the text/video and the others to read/watch the other half

- Ask students to take notes or give them a graphic organizer for notes

- Ask them to work in pairs to describe their half of the text/video to their partner

Student A:

Half of the text or video

Student B:

The other half of the text or video
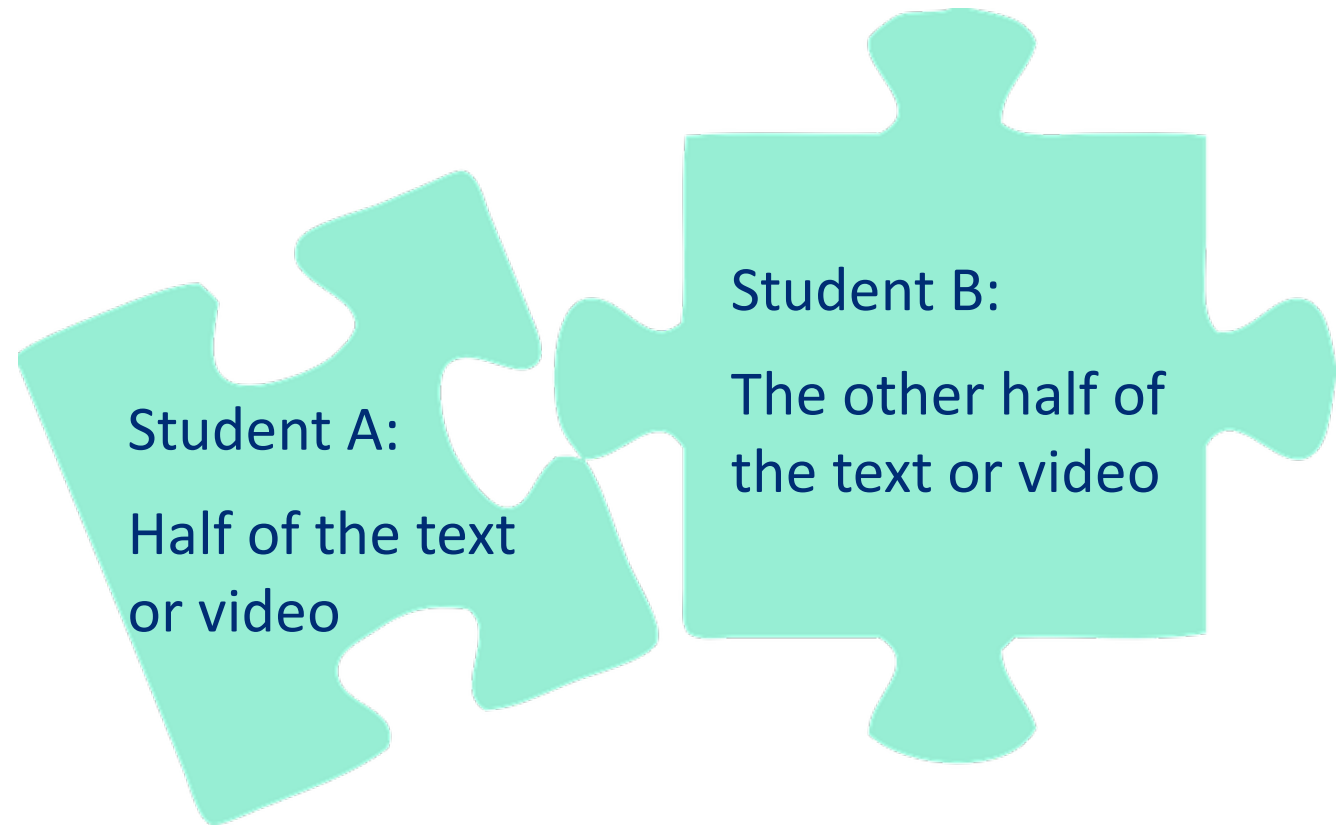
Decision making

You're proposing three activities to the Student Activities Office at your university. Work in a group of three to decide on three activities to propose. Follow the steps below:

1. Spend two minutes to think of three activities on your own

2. Share your activities with your group. If your activities are the same, think of something new so that together you have 9 activities to consider.

3. Discuss and decide on three activities.

Question for you

What types of decisions can you ask students to make in a classroom task?

Dictogloss

Step 1: Choose a short text (100 words) with interesting content

Step 2: Read the text at a normal speed for students to take notes

Step 3: Read the text at a slower speed for students to take more notes

Step 4: Let students share their notes in pairs

Step 5: Read the text again at a normal speed

Step 6: Have students reconstruct the text in pairs with as many details as they can

Step 7: Give them the original text so they can compare and make corrections

Step 8: Collect their work and give more feedback

Let's try one together

Please get your note
paper and pen ready!

- What do you think about the experience?

- How easy or difficult was it to take notes?

- What does it draw students' attention to?

Original text

Ameera has been studying English at Universe University for a few months. She lives with her husband and her 4-year-old son. She has a college degree in psychology and wants to improve her English so she can study for a Master's degree in Counseling Psychology in America. In her English class, people know her for working hard, having strong opinions, and being funny. When she talks in class, she makes people laugh with her funny stories and creative ideas. One day, she told a story about her dream home on a cliff by the ocean, where giraffes eat leaves from trees inside the house. She ended by saying "This is my dream home. Don't ask me why," and everyone laughed out loud for minutes.

Discourse Types

Description: Describing objects, people, sceneries
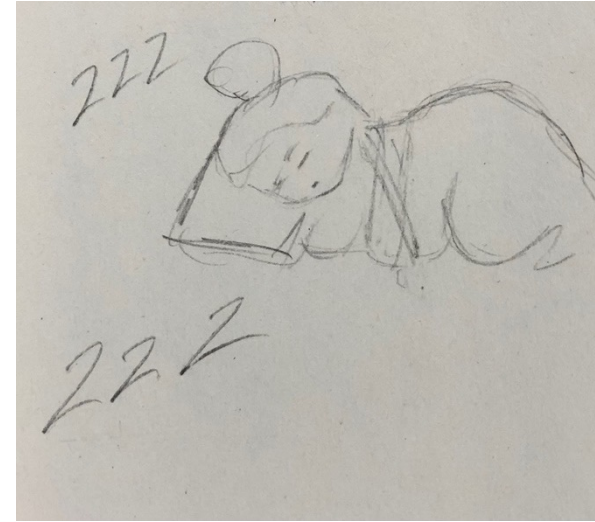
Narration: Telling a story

Instruction: How to make Chung cake, directions, how to solve a math problem
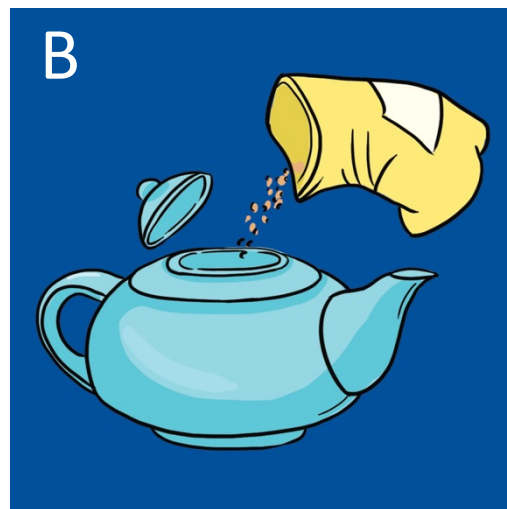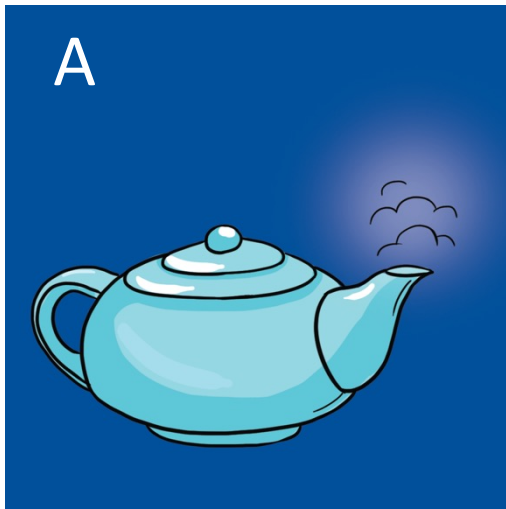
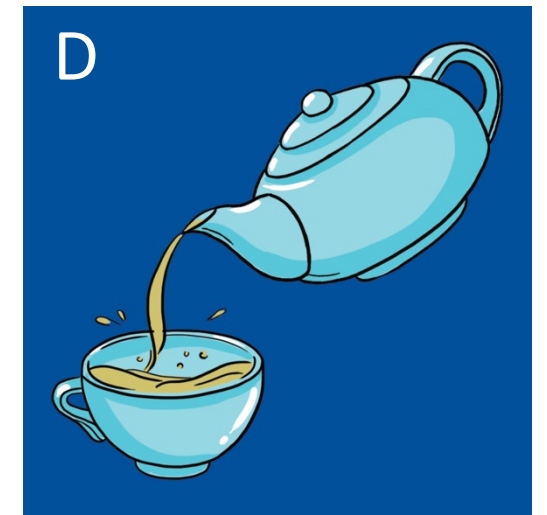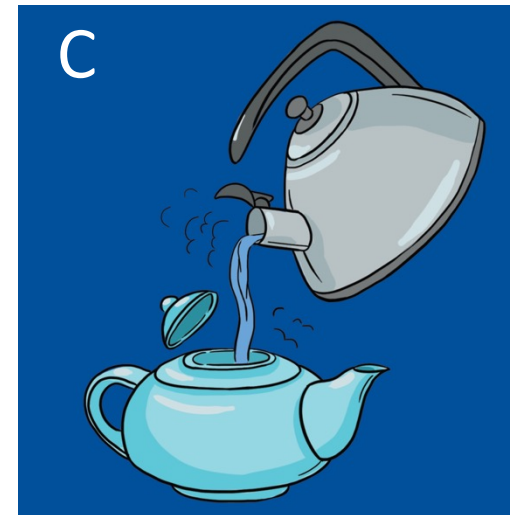**Argumentation:** Stating an opinion and supporting it

Example: Picture Sequencing

Directions: These pictures illustrate how to make tea. Each of you has two pictures. Describe your pictures so you can put them into a sequence. Don't show your pictures to your partner.

Student A

Student B
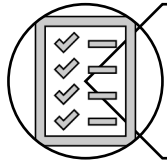

A

B

C

D

Let's try this!

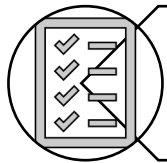# Question for you

What tasks have you used in your classroom?

Task implementation considerations
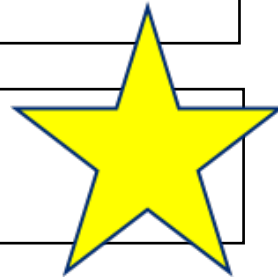
The importance of authentic language use

Criteria of a task
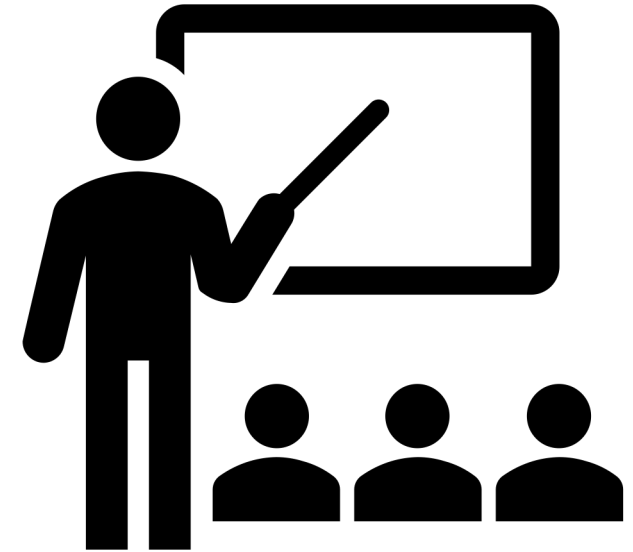
Task types

Task implementation considerations

- Pre-task stage
- Pairing/grouping of participants
- Planning
- Task repetition
- Post-task requirement and review

Task implementation considerations

Pre-task stage

- Give instructions

- Study the task materials

- Review key vocabulary

Ex: *psychology, improve, Master's degree, Counseling Psychology, creative, cliff*

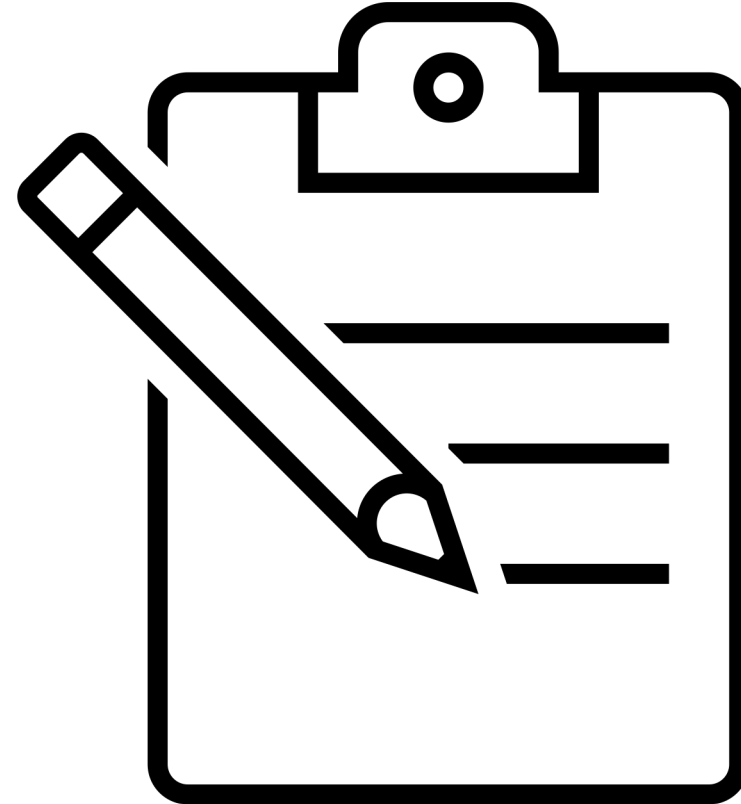# Task implementation considerations

Pairing/ Grouping

- Speaker/ listener roles

- Proficiency level

- Backgrounds

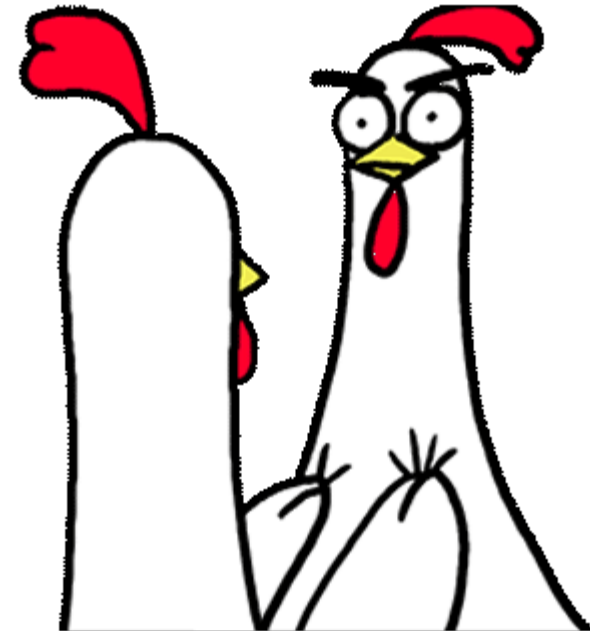# Task implementation considerations

Planning time

- With or without planning

- Planning → more fluent/ complex language use

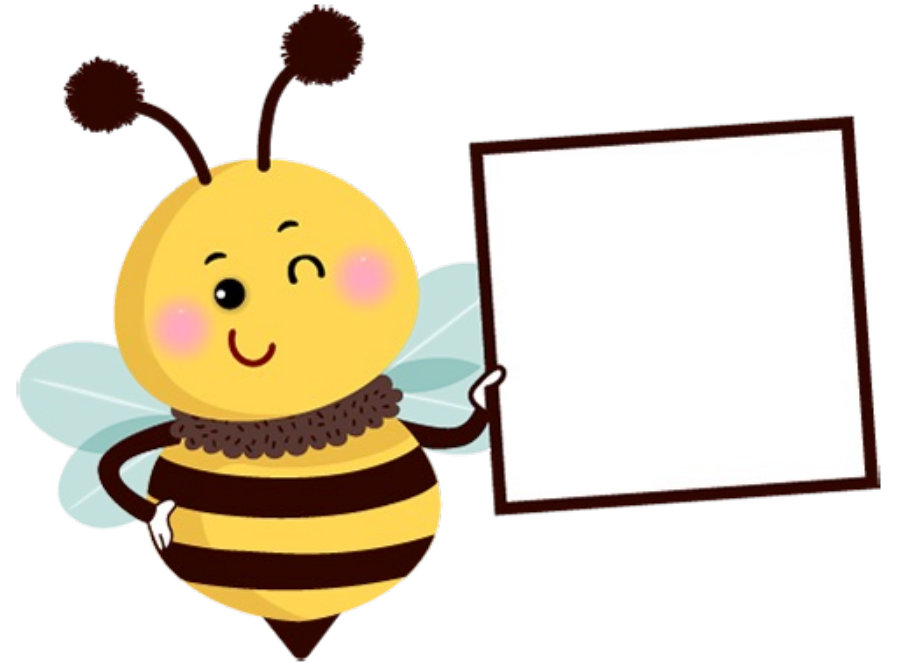# Task implementation considerations

Task repetition

- Repeat the task with a different partner or with a different amount of time

- Helpful for fluency, coherence, and perhaps accuracy

Task implementation considerations

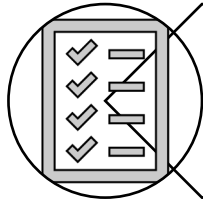**Post-task requirement and review**

- Present the decision to the class

- Submit their work

- Review language
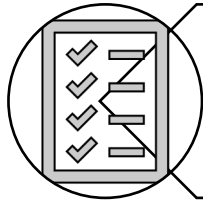
- Reflect on task performance
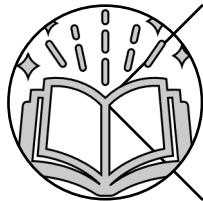
In this session, we've covered …

The importance of authentic language use ✓

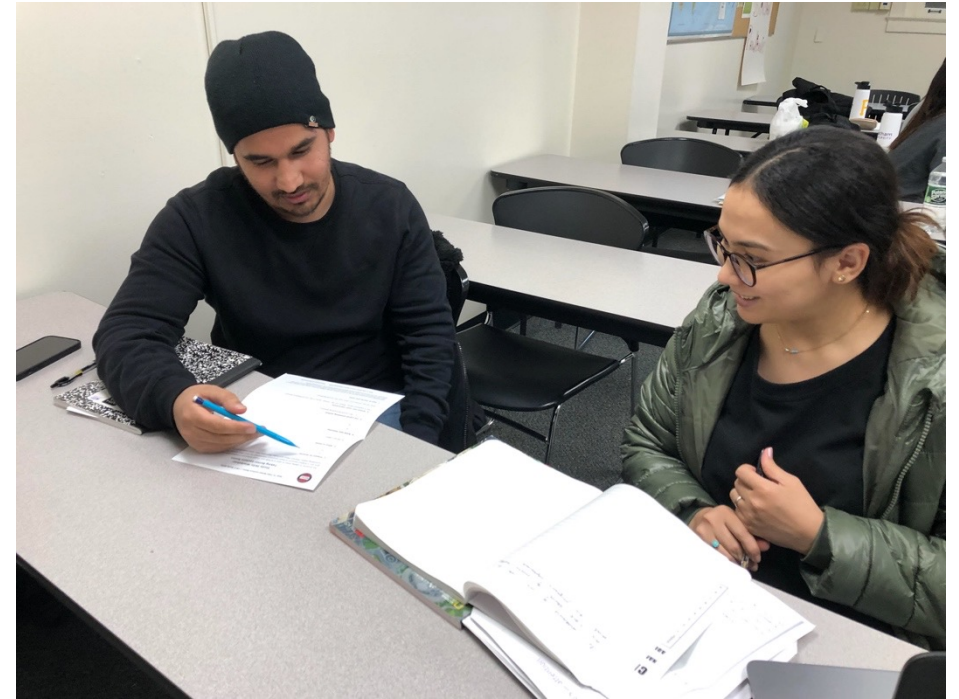Criteria of a task ✓

Task types ✓

Task implementation considerations ✓

Final Comment: Benefits of Tasks

- Encourage authentic language use

- Address language needs as they arise in communication

- Teach language in context → Better transfer to real-life contexts

- Facilitate language development through tasks that involve all skills
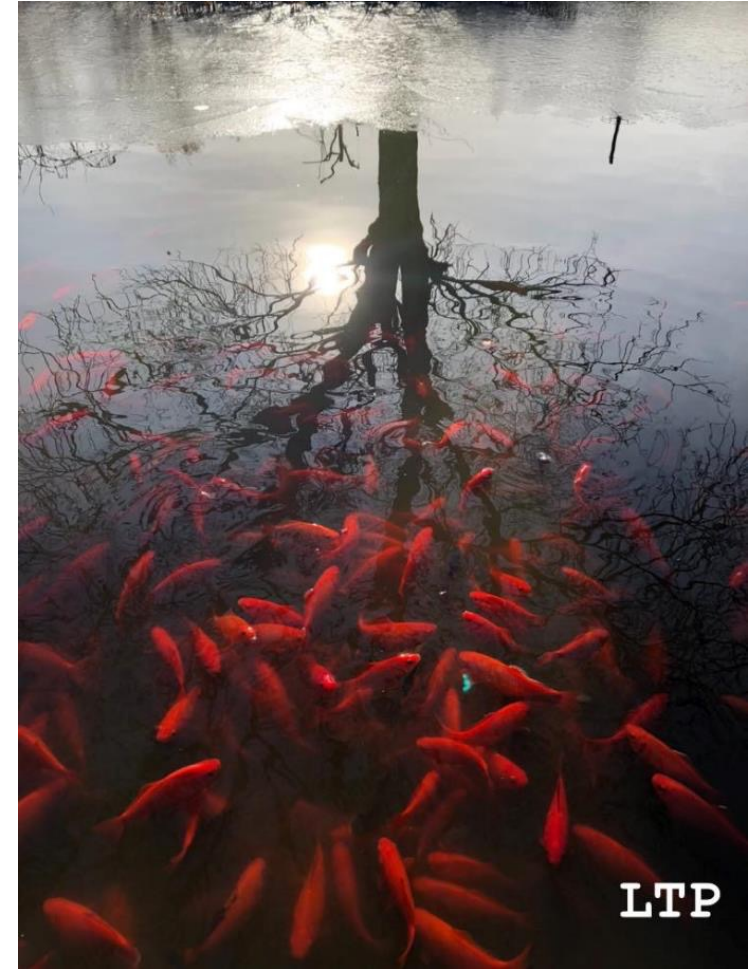
Let's Reflect

Now that you've learned about many considerations in developing tasks, what's something you'd like to try in your next class?

What would you like to learn more about?

Share your ideas in the chat.

References

- Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Ellis, R. (2022). Addressing problems in Task-based Language Teaching [webinar]. Eduling International. https://www.facebook.com/edulingusa/videos/821041652432114

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- Eberhard, D., Simons G., & Fennig, C. (eds). (2022). What's the most spoken language. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. Online version. Retrieved on February 10, 2022: https://www.ethnologue.com/guides/most-spoken-languages

- Van den Branden, K. (2006). *Task-based language teaching: from theory to practice*. Cambridge University Press.

Thank you!

Questions or concerns?

Email: americanenglishwebinars@fhi360.org

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Reflection Questions

1. How might you adapt the tasks shared today to suit your classroom context?

2. What are some challenges to using task-based approaches in your classes? How might you overcome them?

3. What questions do you still have about task-based language teaching? What resources —including other teachers in your professional network—could you consult to learn more about this topic?